

THE EUROPEAN MEETING IN STUTTGART

Living Out a Host of Reconciliations

Despite the bitter cold

and the snow, thousands of young adults were not afraid to set out on pilgrimage, often journeying for two or three days in ill-heated and uncomfortable coaches.

From all the corners of Eastern and Western Europe, they headed towards the German city which had been chosen as the site for this year's European meeting.

When they arrived in Stuttgart, it was freezing. They were all the more joyful to find so warm a welcome in the parishes and families of the city and the surrounding area. This hospitality was one of the most striking elements of this nineteenth European meeting of young adults, which lasted from 28 December to 1 January.

The many Germans who came to Stuttgart from all the regions of the country joined a multitude of others, including over 4,000 from the Baltic countries, 1,400 Romanians, 1,200 Ukrainians, 18,000 Poles and seven coaches from the city of Moscow alone. Participants came from Croatia and Serbia, from Russia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldavia, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria... Young adults were present as well from all the

countries of Western Europe. And of course there were some from many countries on other continents.

A GATHERING THAT TRANSFIGURES A CITY

These young people, who had come to search, pray and meet together, lent a joyful and peaceful look for a few days to the capital of Baden-Wurtemberg. Their presence touched many people,

for example this elderly Polish woman who has lived for many years in the region: "Afterwards, the spirit of the European meeting remains. People even stop you in the street to share their impressions. The families feel enriched by the experience. Their young guests have often written to thank them. In our German context, everyone emphasizes the 'political' dimension of the meeting. World War II and its repercussions re-

main present in people's minds; we need to see signs of reconciliation and to go beyond prejudices to discover the best of others."

The huge halls of the Killesberg Exhibition Centre, set atop a hill, made it possible for all to pray together at midday and in the evening, in every language, around the community of brothers. Each evening, Brother Roger gave a meditation which was translated simultaneously into twenty languages.

In these same halls, meetings were held in the afternoon to go deeper into the wellsprings of the faith, or to meet others from the same country, or for an intercontinental forum. To prepare for their return home, participants from the different countries gave examples of what they are undertaking to promote human solidarities and to make possible an inner life in their local churches.

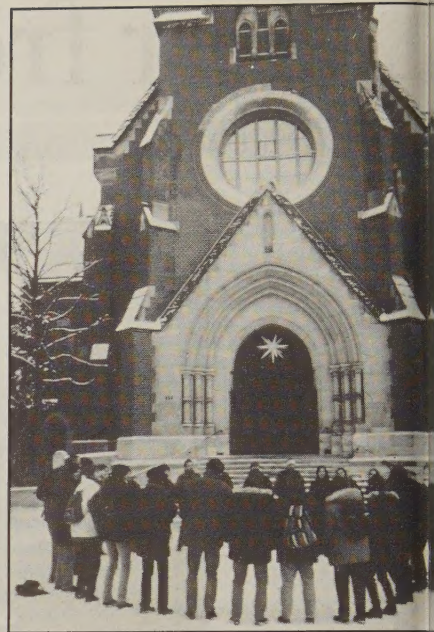
The days began in the 500 Catholic and Protestant parishes by a prayer followed by a time of sharing. This time of reflection enabled people to read and speak about Brother Roger's new letter, "From Doubt to the Brightness of a Communion," to view their lives in the light of the Gospel, and also to deal with the questions which they have to face in their daily lives.

Many parishes had prepared dialogues with witnesses to hope, people committed in the local situation. Christians from Stuttgart spoke about projects of solidarity with the homeless, the unemployed, prisoners, the ill and the elderly, children, immigrants... These conversations often continued during the trip to the Killesberg Exhibition Centre: some had to travel more than half an hour by train to reach the site of their meals and the prayer.

Faith Is Quite A Simple Reality

The Catholic bishop of Stuttgart, Walter Kasper, speaking to representatives from all the parishes of the city, said, "A new desire for God has appeared. It is our duty to make present in the city the dimension of holiness and of the mystery of God. We need to speak more about God. That is what the 70,000 young adults present for the European meeting in Stuttgart did. They showed that the young are not only looking for noise and agitation, but also for silence, and in the silence a few simple words and melodies. In our services we speak far too much; we make everything too complicated. We must go back to more elementary, more central realities. Faith is simple and uncomplicated: it consists in trusting and in surrendering ourselves to the mystery of God, which is beyond our grasp and yet at the same time close at hand, and to God's limitless mercy."

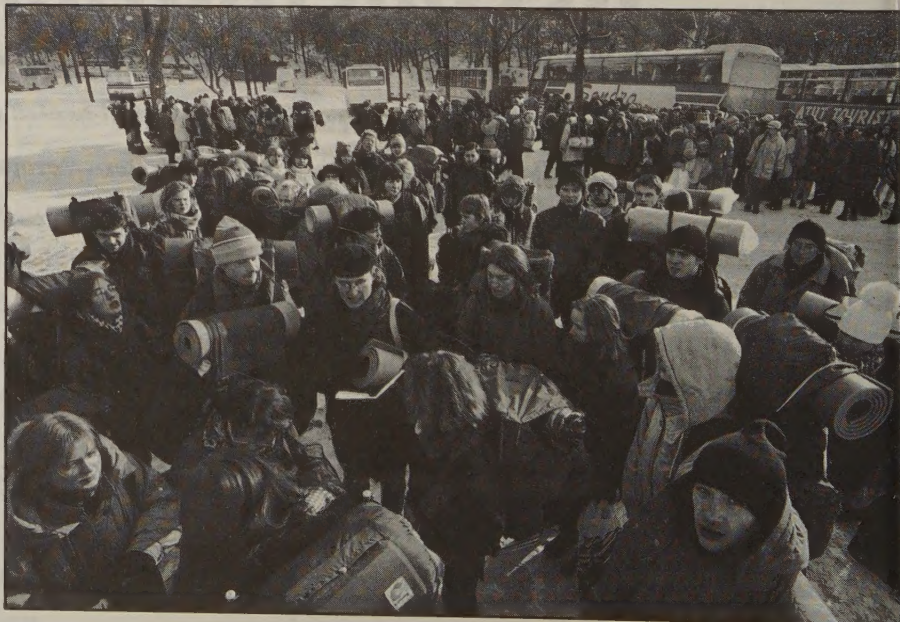
The Lutheran bishop of Stuttgart, Eberhard Renz, shared his impressions: "The European meeting stimulates us to look for another way of living as the Church. I was able to converse for an hour and a half with young people from Russia, Poland, Hungary and Germany. It is beautiful when Christians from different denominations meet; it helps us realize that communion in Christ is wider than each particular church. The fact that so many were offered hospitality in families is very hopeful. People sometimes complain that no one is interested in the churches, but we saw here that faith is part of humanity. Young people are searching for it; they want it."



The transition from one year to the next was made by a prayer for peace which took place simultaneously in 25 churches.

LOVE, AND SAY IT BY YOUR LIFE!

Brother Roger invited the participants to "live out a host of reconciliations in the most diverse situations... They will allow us to enter into the third millennium ready to live an adventure of reconciliation that is as daring as possible. Taking up some words adapted from Saint Augustine, "Love, and say it by your life!" Brother Roger called upon each person to take specific steps in their own situation. In that way, he responded to the urgent need not to separate a spiritual life from the way it is lived out concretely in day-to-day life.





Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox church leaders took part in the common prayers during the meeting: Walterasper, Catholic bishop of Rotenburg-Stuttgart; Eberhard Renz, Lutheran bishop of Wurtemberg; Klaus Engelhardt, president of the German Evangelical churches; the Orthodox bishops Seraphim from the Patriarchate of Bucharest and Vassilios from the Patriarchate of Constantinople; Father Valentin Chavirin, director of the youth movement of the Patriarchate of Moscow.

A HOSPITALITY BEYOND ALL EXPECTATIONS

The hospitality in Stuttgart was similar to that in Wroclaw the previous year. It was possible only because many churches

of different denominations were deeply involved. The preparation teams made up of young people and adults showed great dedication, beyond all expectations, in welcoming people on December 28th and throughout the entire meeting. To support them, some young adults from Taizé were present. One of them was Marit, who shared something of her experience:

"Like many others, during the months before the meeting I visited a school almost every day to speak about the European meeting to religion classes. Sometimes those I spoke to were harsh and critical at first, even aggressive. But gradually, we were able to reflect together about questions that seemed new for many. The same question came coming up: why do people our age from all over Europe who come together for a meeting want above all to pray? Surely they could meet without a Christian basis for it! I felt in many people a fear of letting themselves be persuaded to enter into something for which they were not inwardly ready. In the course of these conversations, we went forward together and we were able to go beyond the usual discussions where at the end someone has to 'win.' They were surprised when I said they could take part in the meeting even without knowing how to pray. They are not used to things that remain open and unfinished. As a result, they became able to listen, to let others speak. And listening is catching. Even the professors often said something personal. In this way, these visits to high schools were sometimes a kind of foretaste of the European meeting."

A European meeting requires a great

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Reaching the Wellsprings of Trust

Here are some excerpts from an article written by some young people about the European meeting:

"In Germany as elsewhere, people who exercise important responsibilities were attentive to the meaning of the European meeting in Stuttgart. In one of his last messages as Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghali wrote, 'At a time when the world, often in pain and suffering, is looking for points of reference and values able to lead it forward and upward, a gathering such as yours is, for us, an encouragement and a sign of hope.'

"The European meetings sow seeds. By themselves, they cannot bring about peace. But precious resources for heading towards the future are brought to light. Resources that can be useful in building our societies. Those who are ready to stand up to say no to indifference, intolerance and selfishness--no to fatalism--are numerous today; the young people who came to Stuttgart are a sign of that.

"Our societies will only become more human if they manage to go beyond their fears. Fear of others, fear of change, different fears of the future that lead people to withdraw and turn inward. The younger generations must be supported in their search for a way out of the strange paradox that characterizes the Western world: societies have never before progressed so rapidly in accumulating knowledge, mastering the forces of nature and wielding technological tools, and yet perhaps never before have societies doubted themselves and their possibilities so much, and focussed upon their failures.

"At Stuttgart, in the times of prayer together as well as in the discussions that break down an unhealthy isolation, participants were able to reach the wellsprings of trust. They freed themselves from the paralyzing grip of defeatism and self-denigration that too often is an excuse for doing nothing. If one of the challenges of our time is to rediscover a creative vitality, perhaps these young people, in their way, are showing a way forward."



Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know — this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death" (Acts 2:22-24).

How did those who were closest to Jesus react to his death? In the light of the resurrection, such a question might appear superfluous. For indeed if Jesus is now alive, then should we not simply forget his sufferings and execution, as

in no uncertain terms: "You crucified and killed him by the hands of those outside the law" (Ac 2:23; see also, for example, 2:36, 3:15). A little while later, Stephen has us see the rejection and death of Jesus as the final episode in the history of all just men and women subjected to violence. There is nothing of redeeming value to be found there, only a murder, a blatant transgression of God's Law (Ac 7:52-53).

What was it that allowed the apostles to speak of this great injustice without falling into the trap of bitter anger and denunciation? The reason lies, no doubt, with their experience of Jesus' resurrection. Never do they speak of

was a connection between the cross and Jesus' life before, and even more there was an inner connection with his resurrection (see Ac 2:22-24). The cross was not simply the opposite pole of the resurrection. If Peter affirms clearly that, considered as a human injustice, the cross is contrary to God's will, he can also say that Jesus was "handed over according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Ac 2:23). Let us at once cast away any idea of God's wishing Jesus to suffer! Peter's words place the events of the passion as it were, on God's side. The events are part of a greater story, that of God's love and all that he has begun. Even in

The cross of Christ, scandal and source of salvation

we do a frightful dream? Having themselves forsaken their master and left him to his executioners, the disciples would have had even more reason to wish never to look back.

The testimony of the New Testament, however, is unmistakable: the disciples are unable to forget and stop speaking of what had happened to Jesus. The authorities responsible for his condemnation think that the disciples speak with vengeance in mind, and imagine that it is in order to accuse them that Peter and the others repeat how Jesus had been wrongly judged (see Ac 5:28). One does not hear though in the apostles' words that harshness of tone characteristic of an accuser. Nor do the disciples seek to cast the blame on one or several of themselves for having abandoned Jesus at that most decisive moment.

Naturally enough, the disciples were unable, at least at the beginning, to speak of Jesus' death in any other terms than that of a catastrophe. In their eyes, the cross was not a sign of blessing (as it would become later and as it is today in churches) but an instrument of execution. Jesus, whom they had loved, had been killed unjustly. Peter says so

him without affirming that "God has raised him up" (for example, Ac 2:24,32; 3:15). The crucifixion of Jesus unveiled the depth of evil present within human beings. But in raising Jesus from the dead, God kept cruelty from having the last word. Innocent though he was, Jesus was condemned by a human tribunal, and this was the height of injustice. God, however, nullified this judgment by bringing Jesus back to life.

An ancient confession of faith expresses the resurrection of Jesus in the following words: "he was justified by the Spirit" (1 Timothy 3:16). By this, we can understand: "God showed him justice by giving him life through the Holy Spirit." From this point of view, the resurrection is God's judgment, to be taken in contrast with the unjust condemnation of the cross. One can easily imagine how much hope this would have given the first Christians, how confident then they would be that God "will quickly grant justice" to all the humble (Luke 18:8), in the same way as he had done for Jesus.

The apostles, however, could not stop there. Horrible as it was, the cross was part of Christ's life story. There

the very midst of the evil which shows itself on the cross, God is present.

God's "definite plan" is nothing other than his irreversible decision to go to the very end of loving. He is ready to love his enemies. By the cross, God suffered because of what his beloved Son suffered, but above all he was one with him in the gift they make together of their love. The word "give", taken alone, does not even seem strong enough: Christ "loved and gave himself up" (Galatians 2:20), meaning that he gave everything unreservedly. And God has done more than give; he "poured out" his love (Romans 5:5) when he "gave up his own Son" (Rom 8:32). Henceforth he can do nothing else but "give all things" (Rm 8:32).

That God should do justice to Jesus by raising him from the dead is most surprising. He does not punish the perpetrators of his death for their act of great injustice. The resurrection does not undo what has happened on the cross, but rather spreads it outwards to every place and to all times. Now risen and alive in the glory of God, Jesus will never be anyone other than the one he was on the cross. For every human being, he is the open source of a love which nothing can close.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD MAY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

COLOSSIANS 3:12-15

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

1 Thu The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him.

Gn 12:1-5

2 Fri Jesus said: This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.

Jn 15:9-13

3 Sat God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have forgiveness.

Col 1:9-14

4 SUN Jesus said: There is no greater love than giving one's life for those one loves.

Jn 15:9-17

5 Mon The Lord says: I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go. I will not abandon you before accomplishing what I have promised you.

Gn 28:10-22

6 Tue Lord, you teach me the way of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy.

Ps 16

7 Wed May God strengthen you in your inner being through the Spirit, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

Ep 3:14-21

8 Thu ASCENSION
Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

Mk 16:15-20

9 Fri Joseph forgave his brothers saying: Do not be afraid; is it for me to put myself in God's place? The harm you planned to do me has, by God's design, been turned to good.

Gn 50:15-21

10 Sat Love is patient and kind. Love does not seek its own advantage, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth.

1 Co 13:1-13

11 SUN Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, that they may be one, as we are one.

Jn 17:11-19

12 Mon Seek God in simplicity of heart; for the Lord reveals himself to those who do not mistrust him.

Ws 1:1-3

13 Tue My soul is waiting for the Lord, I rely on his promise; my soul relies on the Lord more than a night-watchman on the coming of dawn.

Ps 130

14 Wed May our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such ceaseless encouragement and sure hope, encourage and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

2 Th 2:16-3:5

15 Thu The Lord sent me to comfort all who mourn, to clothe them in festive garments instead of despondency.

Is 61:1-4

16 Fri Jesus said: Love one another just as I have loved you. By this, everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

Jn 13:1-15

17 Sat St. Paul writes: Stand firm, one in mind and spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel.

Ph 1:27-30

18 SUN PENTECOST
The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

Jn 20:19-31

19 Mon Isaiah said: God's Spirit will be upon the Messiah. He will not judge by appearances, but he will judge the weak with justice and give fair sentence for the humble in the land.

Is 11:1-10

20 Tue Jesus said to his disciples: You will be persecuted because of my name. But make up your mind not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I shall give you words and wisdom.

Lk 21:5-19

21 Wed Choose life: loving the Lord your God, listening to the Lord's voice, holding fast to him — for in this your life consists.

Dt 30:15-20

22 Thu The Lord says: I will give you a new heart. I will remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you.

Ezk 36:24-27

23 Fri Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Heb 2:5-18

24 Sat May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves following the example of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one voice you may glorify God.

Rm 15:1-6

25 SUN Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

Mt 28:16-20

26 Mon You will seek the Lord your God; you will find the Lord if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.

Dt 4:29-31

27 Tue In the day, God sends his faithful love, and even at night the song it inspires in me is a prayer to the God of my life.

Ps 42

28 Wed Let no one say when they are tempted, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

Jm 1:12-15

29 Thu Jesus said: I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Jn 6:28-35

30 Fri The Lord says: Come back to me with all your heart. Come back to the Lord your God for he is tender and compassionate, and rich in faithful love.

Jl 9:5b-37

31 Sat Jesus said: You did not choose me. No, I chose you, and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit.

Jn 15:9-17

In the first half of the sixth century, Dorotheus of Gaza became a monk in Palestine when he was very young; later, he founded a monastery himself. He said these words to his brothers, words which are like an illustration of what St. Paul wrote to the Colossians:

"Let everyone, in the way that they can, work for the good of all. Always be eager to help each other, whether by teaching and sowing the Word of God in the heart of your brother, or by consoling him in times of trial, or by giving practical help with his work. In a word, let all of you pay attention, each one as much as he can, as I have said, to being united to one another. For the closer someone is to their neighbour, the closer they are to God.

"To help you understand what this means, here is an image taken from the Fathers: imagine a circle drawn on the ground, that is, a line drawn round with a pair of compasses, with a centre. What we call the "centre" is of course the exact middle of the circle. Use your imagination to picture what I am saying. Imagine that the circle is the world; the centre is God; and the radial lines, like spokes, are people's different ways of life. When good people want to come closer to God and so come towards the centre of the circle, as they get nearer to the middle, they get closer to one another at the same time as they approach God. The closer they get to God, the closer they get to one another; and the closer they get to one another, the closer they get to God."

- Does this image used by Dorotheus of Gaza remind me of a personal experience?

- How do I make the connection between love for God and love for others?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JUNE

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

JOHANNINE HOURS

MARK 4:26-29

1 SUN As Jesus was eating with his disciples, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is my body."

Mk 14:12-26

2 Mon Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

Mt 4:18-22

3 Tue The Lord says: I shall put my law deep within them, I shall write it on their hearts. I shall be their God and they will be my people.

Jr 31:31-34

4 Wed Daniel said: May God be blessed for ever and ever. The Lord reveals depths and mysteries, and light dwells with him.

Dn 2:19-23

5 Thu God says: Love the foreigners among you as you love yourselves.

Lv 19:33-34

6 Fri The Lord says to his people: Look and see the joy that is coming to you from God.

Ba 4:36-37

7 Sat Paul writes: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the communion in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Ph 3:4-14

8 SUN Jesus said: Whoever does God's will is a brother, a sister and a mother to me.

Mk 3:31-35

9 Mon God says: I am the Beginning and the End. I shall give water from the well of life freely to anyone who is thirsty.

Rv 21:5-7

10 Tue Above all else, watch over your heart, for it is the well-spring of life.

Pr 4:23

11 Wed Whoever loves their brother or sister lives in the light and need not be afraid of stumbling.

1 Jn 2:3-11

12 Thu Jesus said: It is by your love for one another that everyone will recognize you as my disciples.

Jn 13:31-35

13 Fri You do well to pay attention to the word of the prophets, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

2 P 1:19-21

14 Sat You who revere the Lord, trust in him, await his good gifts: everlasting joy and mercy.

Sl 2:1-11

15 SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, whether he is awake or asleep, the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how.

Mk 4:26-29

16 Mon Peter writes: Cast all your anxiety on God because he cares for you.

1 P 5:6-11

17 Tue May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

2 Th 3:1-5

18 Wed Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ep 4:25-32

19 Thu Love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 P 1:22-25

20 Fri The criminal crucified next to Jesus, said to him, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Lk 23:33-46

21 Sat This is what we have heard from Christ: God is light, in him there is no darkness at all.

1 Jn 1:1-7

22 SUN When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

Mk 4:35-41

23 Mon May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one Body. Live in thankfulness.

Col 3:12-17

24 Tue St JOHN THE BAPTIST The Lord says to his servant: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.

Is 49:1-6

25 Wed We can reassure our hearts before God, whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

1 Jn 3:16-24

26 Thu Peter asked Jesus, "How many times should I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Mt 18:21-22

27 Fri On the cross, Jesus said: Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.

Lk 23:33-34

28 Sat Fathom me, God, and know my heart. Probe me, know my thoughts and guide me in the way that is everlasting.

Ps 139

29 SUN SS PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."

Mt 16:13-20

30 Mon God is faithful and has called you to live in communion with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1 Co 1:4-9

Several times, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God with the growth of a seed. He sees in this phenomenon of nature an image of the dynamism of the love which is his life. The sown seed, small and vulnerable as it is, will bear fruit in an incomprehensible manner. In the same way, the word of Christ meets us in the deepest part of ourselves and transforms us. And in the same way again, self-giving love builds up little by little a communion where everyone finds a place, like the birds of the air in the branches that grow from the grain of mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds (Mark 4:30-32).

The one who sowed the seed began of course by carefully preparing the soil. But as for the growth itself, Jesus insists on the indispensable attitude of trust: "He does not know how". While the seed is germinating and growing, it is not the moment to measure the depth of the roots or to verify the presence of the grain in the ear. The succession of transformations escapes us. Jesus mentions only five which affect the grain during the process of growth. But in our lives, how many transformations are there, impossible to predict or to perceive? The Kingdom of God, the presence of Christ in our lives, becomes apparent in this multitude of transformations — unexpected, imperceptible, and often inexplicable.

What matters, Jesus says, is to be able to perceive the fruit when it is ripe. All through the Gospel, Jesus has his eyes fixed, as it were, on the fruit, the reaping, the grape-harvest. Close to the soil, he knows the joy of the harvest, but he sees there something more than the blessing of God. The reaper is also the one who gives a meaning to everything that has remained hidden, who reveals the best, even in the place where the weeds seemed to have gained the upper hand (Mt 13:29-30). This is also the way in which Jesus sees the mission of the disciples: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Lk 10:2).

- What transformations in my life give me confidence that the grain grows "all by itself"?
- What helps me to see that which is good, that which gives meaning to my life and to the lives of others?



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deal of work by the host parishes. And so, it demands much effort on the part of the many volunteers who come two days ahead of time from throughout Europe: this year, 4,000 of them came to ensure the welcome of the others. It may be less obvious that other people and groups must collaborate in order to make things work, for example those in charge of public transportation. They were faced by the almost impossible task of enabling all the participants to arrive at the Exhibition Centre at the same time. Many workers had to give up their holidays so that there could be enough trains, buses and subways. A bus driver from the city said, "I was asked to take on additional trips as a bus driver. On the last day, for example, I drove people to the train station. It was impressive to see how moved they were when they said goodbye. The hosts did not want to let their visitors go! After they left, we understood better how fortunate we were to have welcomed these young adults who had travelled so far because of Christ, and who are able to look for God again and again. I said to those who rode in my bus, 'Thank you for coming; thank you for having prayed with us.'"

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

The European meeting will have long-term consequences for many people. A pastor from Stuttgart expressed this during a meeting in his parish in January:

"It took time for us really to be happy about the meeting beforehand. And as a pastor, I am all the more pleased to see that now things have 'clicked.' The European meeting brought us all together, Catholics and Protestants, in a common endeavor. And nothing is stereotyped as it was before. Something happens as soon as people from different cultures meet; reconciliation is catching, and so it

was good that we could experience this in our own situation. In our neighbourhood, people from more than twenty different countries live. Can we not benefit from the impetus given by the meeting to imagine something new here?

"I am also grateful that the preparation team from Taizé insisted that we give more responsibility to the young people. It is important for us to have discovered that they were able to handle those responsibilities.

"Thanks to the prayers, we realized that the truth must also be beautiful. Truth and beauty are not opposites; they walk hand in hand. We should give more room to this reality, as well as to silence and meditation."

A LONG HISTORY

One of the reasons for the warm welcome in Stuttgart can be found in the long history of contacts between that region and Taizé. For some people, this history goes back a long

way. When the Taizé Community was just beginning, during the Second World War, Brother Roger was still alone; he was asked to hide refugees, especially Jews, who were fleeing the occupied zone of France. A few years later, when the war was over, two German prisoner-of-war camps were set up close to Taizé. Brother Roger and his first brothers welcomed some of these prisoners for prayer and a meal. One of them now lives in Stuttgart and had this to say:

"It was after the war, Christmas 1945. Our camp was in the woods. It was not far from Taizé; we could go on foot. Our work was to gather dead branches in the underbrush. Before Christmas, a brother visited us and invited us to celebrate Christmas in the church. After the service, the doors of the house were opened: 'Come in and sit at our table!' The table was set with coffee, cakes and gifts for each person. What an event for us, living in the woods, with no contact with anyone! Afterwards, some of us were able to attend church in Taizé every Sunday, until our camp was relocated. After having experienced that in France, you can understand our joy at being able to welcome people in Stuttgart and to offer hospitality in our turn."



In Asia

In its February 1 issue of this year, the review "Eglises d'Asie" (Churches of Asia) published an article about Taizé's presence in Asia. We reproduce here several portions of the article:

Whenever one visits Taizé and finds him or herself among the many thousands of young people from throughout the world who go to pray and deepen their faith and commitment there, one will come across young Asians. Whatever their Christian background, whether Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox, they have been sent by their local churches to live several months on the hill and share their faith and hope with other young people.

A young Filippina who works with young people in her diocese in the northern part of the country writes: "The very first word I remember hearing, at the beginning of my three-month stay, was 'discover', uttered by a Korean brother, an English word which was not new to me but the meaning and essence of which I would eventually learn. And it was through a process of discovery that I would come upon the basic questions of Christian faith. Something beckoned and something within me responded, and then I knew: I was on a pilgrimage. And my journey now continues here in the Philippines. I went to Taizé with a suitcase as if full of the best of myself, but I learned that what counts most is humility, sincerity, and faith. If I was wrapped with all sorts of things upon my arrival, I left open to the possibilities God might ask of me."

A LONG-LIVED PRESENCE IN ASIA

If the first visit to Taizé of an Asian — an Indian from Kerala — dates back to 1947, it was at the end of the 60's that small groups of brothers in their turn went to live, among the very poorest, in various Asian countries. Today they can be found in Bangladesh and South Korea. Brother Roger himself has gone for several longer visits, notably in Calcutta, Manila, Hong Kong, Bangladesh and Thailand.

As a result of the various contacts made by brothers present in Asia as well as by the international meetings held in Taizé itself, church leaders in different Asian countries have invited the Community to work with their young people. Over the years, Taizé has been led to collaborate with national youth commissions and youth ministry animators in nearly all the countries of Asia.

Taizé has, for instance, been invited to prepare international meetings for young people in India, in the city of Madras in 1985 and 1988, and in the Philippines, in Manila in 1991, meetings which brought together up to some 20,000 young people.

AN ENDLESS STRING OF GATHERINGS

Meetings prepared by brothers of Taizé are held on a continuing basis from one end of Asia to the other, from Pakistan to Japan, in Singapore, Indonesia, and Sarawak (East Malaysia). Often organized in the form of a retreat, these gatherings or "pilgrimages" are intended to support the hope of young people committed in various ways in the Church and the human family. In October 1995, a vast survey on Christian youth in India reported that "the brothers of Taizé, through pilgrimages of trust and reconciliation, have accompanied the Indian youth and have contributed greatly towards the revival of youth apostolate in the country."

Countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Burma, where Christians live in particularly precarious situations, are visited regularly by brothers. In 1992, Bishop Belo of Dili, in East Timor, the recipient of this year's Nobel peace prize, invited brothers to animate a retreat for the priests of his diocese. On August 6, 1995 in Hiroshima, Japan, fifty years after the explosion of the atom bomb, Taizé was invited to animate a prayer vigil in the city's cathedral.

The "songs of Taizé" are sung in some fifteen different Asian languages. In style not unlike the Indian *badjans*, these songs have been used for prayer prepared by brothers in two assemblies of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, in 1990 in Bandung, Indonesia and 1995 in Manila, Philippines, as well as for the Asian Congress on Evangelization held in 1992.

WITH RESPECT FOR THE SPIRITUAL IDENTITY OF ASIA

The director of a retreat and formation center in Taiwan affirms: "People here are not influenced first of all by theories or ideas. They need to experience and sense things, and when possible with their friends, all together. The prayer of the Taizé brothers introduces people to meditation on divine revelation. In a way barely perceptible and all the while together with others, one senses the force of God's word, and discovers the weight of silence heavy with an ever new presence. And one sings, gently, while sharing in one and the same joy."

The Archbishop of Calcutta, Henry D'Souza, writes: "Asia needs reconcilia-

tion. The continent today is being torn asunder by its inherent divisions and marked by an immense diversity of peoples, languages, religions, cultures and colors. A tradition of deep tolerance exists. In the past, the great religions which were born in Asia lived in peaceful harmony. However, over the last decades, religion has become an instrument of conflict. In order for Asia to grow, reconciliation and acceptance of all human beings is urgently needed. Taizé offers an image of reconciliation and acceptance of the common humanity of Asian peoples. Asia did not experience the Second World War in the same way Europe did, but it is no less devoid today of the arms which undermine its vital life energy and corrode its spiritual and religious traditions. Those who have experienced Taizé speak of the necessity of these values in the context of their own country's inner diversity. Given the situations they find themselves in, they can be tempted to live apart from the believers of other religions. Taizé has enabled them to understand that in Christ, all become one. They learn to love and have esteem for all human beings with all their diversity, and the knowledge that the Lord is the source and endpoint of all people, in the same way that he is the Alpha and Omega of the universe. Depressing poverty and widespread misery mark the peoples of Asia. They should listen to the prayer of Saint Augustine, sung unceasingly: 'Jesus Christ, inner light, do not let my darkness speak to me.'"

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